

CATHERINE'S LITERARY WORK

been a Dante student.¹ It would be pleasant to think of such passages as the mystical espousals of St. Francis with Poverty, the praises of St. Dominic, or St. Bernard's invocation to the Blessed Virgin, being read aloud in Catherine's circle, and Saint and secretaries alike being fired by the music of him who had fought the same battle for righteousness more than half a century before.

From the consideration of her own order, Catherine turns to the religious life in general, the excellence of its ideals, the disastrous results when these are corrupted or neglected. The perfect religious, *il vero obbediente*, he who has humbled himself like a little child to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, is contrasted with the unfaithful and disobedient monk or friar, "who stays in the bark of his order with such great pain to himself and to others, that in this life he tastes the pledge of hell." Midway between the two types is that of the average religious, neither perfect nor corrupt, but lukewarm in his profession, ever in danger of falling, but still with the power of joining the truly obedient in their holy race. After a glowing eulogy of the virtue of obedience, illustrated by the miracles that the saints of old have wrought by its power, and a recapitulation of the whole book, Catherine ends with the impassioned eloquence of what may be called her universal prayer :—

" Thanks, thanks be to Thee, eternal Father, for Thou hast not despised me, Thy creature, nor turned Thy face from me, nor contemned my desires. Thou that art light, hast not considered my darkness ; Thou that art life, hast not considered my death ; nor hast Thou, the physician, turned from my grievous maladies. Thou art eternal purity, and I am full of the mire of many miseries ; Thou art infinite, and I am finite ; Thou art wisdom, and I am foolishness ; for all these and other infinite evils and defects that are in me, Thy wisdom, Thy goodness, Thy clemency, and Thy infinite blessedness has not despised me ; but in Thy light Thou hast given me light, in Thy wisdom I have known the truth, in Thy clemency I have found Thy charity and the

¹ Cf. *Letters dei discepoli*, 18. But Capececiaturo, pp. 343, 344, following Ignazio Cantu, much overstates Catherine's possible knowledge of Dante.